

*Royal Backbone and Body Politic:
Aristocratic Titles and Cook Islands
Nationalism since Self-Government*

Jeffrey Sissons

Nation building has everywhere entailed the encompassment of earlier or alternative imagined communities (Anderson 1991). European and Asian nationalists have incorporated monarchical and dynastic imaginings into their modern communal designs; Islamic nationalists have derived principles of legitimacy from an ideal of religious community; and African and Pacific leaders have used kinship ideologies to naturalize and lend an air of primordial authenticity to their postcolonial identities. Since self-government was gained in the Cook Islands in 1965, holders of traditional titles—*ariki*, *mata'iapo*, and *rangatira*—have come to symbolize continuity between a precolonial past and a postcolonial present. Albert Henry and Cook Islands leaders who followed him sought to include elements of this traditional hierarchy in the nation-state and, through ideological inversion, to represent themselves as ideally subordinate to, or in partnership with, its leadership.

But including elements of the old in the new, the traditional in the modern, also introduces contradiction into the heart of the national imagining. Elements that at first expressed continuity between past and present may later come to serve as a perpetual reminder of rupture, of a past (a paradise?) that has been lost but might yet be regained. Since the late 1980s, in the context of a rapidly expanding tourist industry that values (as it commodifies) indigenous distinctiveness, Cook Islands traditional leaders have been pursuing, with renewed enthusiasm, a greater role in local government and more autonomy in deciding matters of land and title succession. Although some view these developments with alarm, fearful that

they will lead to an erosion of democracy, others see them as no more than the restoration of long-held traditional rights that have been systematically denied by colonial, and now postcolonial, administrations. Cook Islands politicians have demonstrated considerable ambivalence, enthusiastically participating in a discourse on title and entitlement on the one hand, while showing reluctance to effect corresponding legislative changes on the other.

White has noted similar situations elsewhere in the Pacific, particularly in Melanesia (1992). He has observed that in the Solomon Islands, despite discussions about new roles for chiefs within the independent state that have been continuing for almost twenty years, minimal institutional change has occurred. Rather than dismiss talk of chiefs as merely an exercise in rhetoric, however, White has suggested that it "establishes and maintains a discursive space that might otherwise be crowded out by global modernizing forces" (1992, 101). Within this space, chiefs represent "aspects of cultural value and identity" that are under threat from state bureaucracy and Western values (1992, 98). In the Cook Islands, and particularly on the main island of Rarotonga, national politics have penetrated deeply into local life. The intense politicization of Cook Islands society that accompanied the establishment and demise of Albert Henry's "one party dominant state" (Stone 1970) has meant that local talk of chiefs has become inextricably bound up with party politics and transformations of national identity. Talk of titles, instead of defining a separate, alternative discursive and cultural space, has become central to the definition of a distinctive national cultural space within which degrees of local autonomy may be negotiated.

In this paper I discuss the inclusion, since self-government, of traditional aristocratic titles within the Cook Islands nation-state, and their simultaneous exclusion from positions of state power. My discussion builds on an earlier paper in which I have outlined and discussed the more general processes of transformation and commodification of Cook Islands nationality (Sissons *nd*). In that paper I distinguished four main periods in the recent development of Cook Islands nationalism: first, party nationalism under the charismatic leadership of Albert Henry between 1965 and 1974; second, a first wave of ethnicization between 1974 and 1978 associated with the development of the local tourist industry; third, the period from 1978 to 1988, when, under Tom Davis's leadership, Albert Henry's nationalist apparatus was dismantled; and fourth, a second wave of ethni-

cization, beginning in 1989 with the return of a Cook Islands Party government under Geoffrey Henry. I argue here that the inclusion of traditional titles within the body politic, as a subprocess of the broader nation-building project, corresponded closely (if not exactly), to these periods. During the first years of Albert Henry's Cook Islands Party government, *ariki* 'paramount chiefs associated with islands or major districts' were accorded a symbolic position as local royalty and at the same time were excluded from any significant role in local government. During the first wave of ethnicization, *ariki* became further marginalized as greater government recognition was accorded subordinate, or local, titleholders (*mata'iapo*) and the lesser-ranked and genealogically junior *rangatira*. The "Davis years" saw these local leaders once more excluded from formal participation in national politics as *ariki* recovered a measure of royal status. Finally, accompanying the second wave of ethnicization since 1989, *ariki* and other titled leaders have made renewed efforts to secure greater autonomy from the state in matters of land, title, and local government.

Rarotongan traditions generally agree that the inherited titles of *ariki*, *mata'iapo*, and *rangatira*, and the political order that they represented were established by the "canoe" ancestors, Tangiia and Karika, some thirty generations ago. Title hierarchy was reproduced through elaborate investiture ceremonies held on *marae* 'ritual arenas' and during spectacular annual processions that moved around the island from *marae* to *marae* along a paved road (*ara metua*) built for this purpose (Sissons 1989, 343–344). These *marae* ceremonies confirmed the divine nature of *ariki* as mediators between gods and people. However, like that of other Polynesian chiefs, the power of *ariki* was understood to originate ambiguously from "above" and "below" at the same time, the collective support of *mata'iapo* being an essential complement to that of the gods (Howard 1985, 71; Valeri 1985, 98; Baltaxe 1975, 11; Sissons 1989, 331–335).

At the most general level, the Rarotongan polity was, and remains today, triadic in structure, comprising three confederations or *vaka* (literally, canoes); Takitumu, Te Au-o-Tonga and Puaikura (also known as Arorangi). Each *vaka* comprises a number of genealogically related *ngati*, cognatic descent groups with rights to segments of land (*tapere*) that stretch from the mountainous interior to the sea. The Takitumu *vaka* is represented by two *ariki* titles, Pa and Kainuku; the Te Au-o-Tonga *vaka* by three, Makea Nui, Makea Karika, and Vakadini; and the Puaikura *vaka* by Tinomana Ariki. Within each *vaka*, each *ngati* is represented by

at least one *mata'iaipo* (or in some cases an *ariki*), and both *ariki* and *mata'iaipo* are supported by genealogically junior *rangatira*.

Ariki, *mata'iaipo*, and *rangatira* retain ambiguous statuses within Rarotongan society, although they are no longer tied to their position as mediators between ancestral gods and people. Rather, as Christian leaders who participate as landowners and decision makers at village level, and as relatively wealthy public servants and entrepreneurs who participate in the wider state and economy, titleholders now mediate between the local and the national, between kin-based authority and bureaucratic power. At the local level, *mata'iaipo*, *rangatira* and, to a lesser extent, *ariki* are actively involved in village politics and are called on to settle family disputes and speak on behalf of the *ngati* at public events. At the national level, these Christian titleholders are coming to symbolize a recent public pride in a pre-Christian past. Rather than a time of "darkness" when, as one *mata'iaipo* said, "they didn't know what it was to be truly human," this past is now being reinterpreted by some as a source of a distinctive and deeper humanity. Although annual processions along the *ara metua* have not been organized since the arrival of Christianity in 1823, investiture ceremonies have continued to be performed. Over recent years, increasingly elaborate ceremonies have come to publicly symbolize the strengthening of ties with a traditional past. These links are being actively fostered by the Ministry of Cultural Development, which to this end is encouraging the performance of investiture ceremonies and informing the wider public of their meaning. The ministry recently explained, for example, that a "normal" investiture for an *ariki* begins with

a *korero* or warning on how the *ariki* should behave and rule. The *ariki toko-toko*, or staff is offered to the *ariki*. This signifies the *ariki's* right and power to rule and judge offenders. The wearing of the *maro ariki*, or girdle follows next. This symbolizes the moulding together of the tribes [*ngati*] as a united people under the *ariki's* shelter of peace and love. The *akatainuanga*, or anointing performed by the *ta'unga* [priest] is the next phase. The *akapareanga* or crowning by the *ta'unga* follows. This represents the *ariki's* responsibility regarding the welfare of the tribe [*vaka*]. A *karakia* or dedication by the *ta'unga* follows. The *akaruuruanga* is performed by the tribe whereby the *ariki* is elevated on a platform to cheers of support and praise. (Ministry of Cultural Development, *CIN*, 6 April 1993)

In practice, the performance of these ceremonies varies considerably between *vaka*, and, for *mata'iaipo* and *rangatira*, between *ngati* in terms of

elaborateness of costume, numbers in attendance, and the role of the church. Only recently, for example, did a Christian minister agree to act as *ta'unga* for a *marae* investiture. In general, local ministers have been reluctant to dignify what is still regarded by many as a heathen stage.

The Cook Islands is more than a nation of Christians; it is also a nation of citizens, a self-governing parliamentary democracy. The transition to self-government in 1965 marked the beginnings of efforts by the state and titleholders to find a secure place for titles within a modernist, postcolonial, national structure. How could titleholders be included in a modern nation of citizens as representatives of an earlier, alternative political order? How should the community they represented be encompassed by a postcolonial Cook Islands? How might the symbolic significance of titles within the nation be translated into a political role within the state? The following narrative describes the ongoing and contested attempts by successive governments to resolve these questions as part of a larger nation-building project.

My argument is deliberately presented in narrative form in order to present the dynamics of the contradictory process of title inclusion and exclusion, giving due weight to the complex interplay between structure and agency. By privileging social process over social coherence, I emphasize that aristocratic titles have no essential cultural meanings "out of time" for Cook Islanders. Their multiple and ambiguous meanings are perpetually in motion, tied to political intention and ideological practice. The narrative demonstrates that, as the Cook Islands nation-building project proceeded, it entailed shifting forms of ideological inclusion and political exclusion with respect to titles. The nature of and reasons for these shifts are identified and discussed in the hope of contributing to a broader understanding of the theory and practice of postcolonial nationality in the Pacific Islands.

RESTORING THE BACKBONE OF THE NATION?

In its *Manifesto*, issued for the elections of April 1965, the Cook Islands Party promised "to restore recognition to the holders of traditional titles" (Strickland 1979, 9). The promise had considerable electoral appeal (CILA 1966, 418), and immediately after the election, the new government, in an early assertion of its greater sovereignty, amended the Cook Islands Constitution, replacing a Council of State (originally to comprise two *ariki*

and the high commissioner) with a House of Ariki. A House of Ariki bill was introduced and debated in the Legislative Assembly in September the following year. In his opening speech in support of the bill, Premier Albert Henry stressed that the retention and recognition of the nation's "royal heritage" would associate the Cook Islands with the more fortunate nations of the world, such as Great Britain, Tonga, and Samoa, each of which had maintained a strong sovereign identity. Unlike the Israelis, Egyptians, Tahitians, Fijians, and the New Zealand Maori (the last described as "strangers in their own land"), these nations had not allowed their social existence to be "joined to a different backbone."

The *ariki*, *mata'iapo*, *rangatira* and their tribes are the backbone of all nations in this world, for any nation to allow this backbone to be broken or to disappear would mean that they are relying on a foreign backbone for their survival. . . . Let us look at the people of the world and I will divide them into three sections. One group of people in the world have a monarchy as their backbone, that is one section. The second section of people in the world consists of those who had a royal heritage once but have allowed it to disappear and have adopted something different. Thirdly there are nations which from their inception did not have that royal heritage. (CILA 1966, 416)

The choice before the people of the Cook Islands was a clear one: either to follow the path of Great Britain, the mother country, and retain an indigenous spine, or to follow that of the New Zealand Maori and allow "the backbone of Polynesian existence to disappear." In any case, the premier noted, the *ariki* had been consulted and had expressed full support for the bill. With more than a hint of disingenuousness, he asked, "Who are we Assembly members to question and oppose the decisions of our *ariki*?" (CILA 1966, 416-417).

This speech, heard by members of the Legislative Assembly, *ariki* from Rarotonga and the outer islands attending the debate, and Cook Islanders listening to it live on government radio, introduced the core elements of a post-1965 signification of *ariki* as royal representatives of a newborn nation. *Ariki*, like the British monarchy, lent historical depth to this nation while increasing its prestige (at least in its own eyes) within the Pacific region. In particular, their royal presence raised the status of Cook Islanders above that of their less fortunate Polynesian cousins, the Tahitians and the New Zealand Maori. Finally, because they were royal, they were, like the British monarchy, above the more mundane concerns of

daily politics. Even the premier, it seemed, owed them deference and respect.

The following year, at the opening of the House of Ariki, the premier reemphasized the close association between the Cook Islands and Britain and spoke of the ability of their royal houses to unify the nation as embodiments of its spirit.

Although England is only a small island, many people all over the world who have never been there nevertheless are loyal because England carries the spirit of tradition that binds millions of people together. . . . It is that spirit which has no other use, but without which we would be a scattered and disrupted nation. . . . Today we are a small country, a new-born nation, yet the little fragments of earth which comprise this new nation are scattered over nearly a million square miles of ocean. How can a new-born baby live and exist if scattered so many miles apart? Do we, as a nation, expect to live by the law alone . . . or do we want to be brought together by the spirit of something bigger than the law? (CIN, 24 Aug 1967)

Ceremonial Inclusion

As a counterpart to the rhetorical positioning of *ariki* as royalty, their regal nature was ceremonially displayed and confirmed on a regular basis, principally during the annual celebrations of self-government and less frequently, but no less effectively, during royal visits. Celebrations of self-government, termed constitution celebrations, began in 1966, and by 1969 they had become an "invented" national tradition in the Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) sense. In that year, and throughout the 1970s, the festivities took place over a ten-day period, culminating in speeches and presentations on 4 August, Constitution Day. *Ariki* participated in these festivities as generous hosts, honored dignitaries, and official speakers. For the first four celebrations, Makea Nui Ariki, CBE, played the role of magnanimous host to the nation, making available the facilities and grounds of Taputapuata (also known as Makea's Palace) as the main venue and providing a large *umukai* 'feast' for official guests (CIN, 5 Aug 1967). If expressions of popular appreciation were muted, her generosity did not go unrecognized by the government newspaper: "There was no doubt that the thousands present thanked Makea Nui Ariki CBE in their hearts for her generous gesture of opening Taputapuata for the memorable, indeed historic, event. A united Cook Islands event" (CIN, 7 Aug 1968). Seating arrangements and the order of speeches for Constitution Day itself also visibly identified

ariki as dignified representatives of the nation. In 1966, for example, *ariki* were seated on a raised stage to the right of the high commissioner and premier for the official speeches (CIN, 3 Aug 1966). Invited guests and others listening to the live radio broadcast were treated to a trio of speakers; first, the New Zealand high commissioner (head of state and the queen's representative), second, the president of the House of Ariki (representing local royalty), and third, the premier. *Ariki* were thus positioned between external and internal powers, on the political boundary of the new nation (CIN, 3 Aug 1966; 6 Aug 1966).

The ideal occasions for royal display were, of course, visits to the Cook Islands by members of the British royal family. Prominent events during the visit by the Duke and Duchess of Kent in July 1967 included the opening, by the Duke, of the House of Ariki and receptions for the royal couple hosted by *ariki* in each of the three main districts (*vaka*) of Rarotonga. The receptions, put on in sequence to punctuate a precisely timed tour of the main island, included ceremonial challenges by *mata'iapo* at each *vaka* boundary, welcomes, presentations of gifts from the *ariki* (from Pa and Kainuku in the Takitumu district; from Tinomana in the Puaikura district; and from Makea Nui, Karika, and Vakatini in the Te Au-o-Tonga district), displays of mass dancing, and gifts from the people. In two of the districts the Duke and Duchess were carried to meet the *ariki* on decorated *pa'ata*, platforms upon which *ariki* are carried after their investitures (CIR, Oct 1967, 8-II; CIN, 4 July 1967). The Duke of Edinburgh, Earl Mountbatten, and other representatives of the British monarchy participated in a similar "meet the people" tour in January 1971. Again, challenges on behalf of the *ariki*, presentations of gifts, and displays of mass dancing were distinctive features (CIN, 1 Mar 1971). During both visits, *pa'ata*, elaborately decorated with flowers and greenery, served as symbolic vehicles (sign-vehicles) for identifying British with local royalty.

Institutional Inclusion and Exclusion

If *ariki* were local royalty positioned above common politics, would it not be appropriate for the House of Ariki to play a role similar to that of the British House of Lords, overseeing and commenting on legislation proposed in the Legislative Assembly? Certainly this appears to have been the initial intention of the Cook Islands Party. When, in May 1965, a delegation headed by Albert Henry visited New Zealand to discuss changes to the constitution with a parliamentary select committee, they took with

them a proposal to establish a House of Ariki with the power to refer legislation back to the Legislative Assembly:

After the first time the *ariki* could demand consultation with cabinet. . . . The Cook Islands Government would [also] look favourably upon a proposal for *ariki*, in addition to the High Commissioner, to represent the Queen. No law that runs counter to traditional land usage would be enforced unless so requested by the *ariki*s and *kavanas* [Mangaian traditional leaders] of the island involved. (*PIM*, June 1965, 35)

If this report was correct, then the House of Ariki bill, introduced into the Legislative Assembly the following year, delivered considerably less than had been promised. The right to refer back legislation was omitted, *ariki* would not be able to demand consultation with cabinet, there was no reference to an *ariki* serving as the queen's representative, and the House of Ariki would have no veto powers over any legislation. Instead, the House of Ariki would be a consultative body that would only consider and make recommendations on legislation submitted to it by the Legislative Assembly. It could make recommendations on matters affecting Cook Islands "customs and traditions" or "the inhabitants of the Cook Islands," but only after first inviting the premier or his representative to attend the debate. Any such recommendations would also need to be accompanied by a note explaining why they were being proposed and accounting for any opposing viewpoints within the House of Ariki (House of Ariki Act, section 8). Adding insult to injury, the premier gave himself the right to "at any time attend and address the House" (House of Ariki Act, section 10).

It seemed to Geoffrey Henry, member for the island of Aitutaki (and future prime minister), that this bill was simply a "way of getting the *ui ariki* [*ariki* collectively] into one place and placing them almost completely under the control of the Government" (CILA 1966, 424). Moreover, the House of Ariki, as established under this bill, would not be in any way a Polynesian House of Lords. By not including many of the original proposals in its final bill (proposals that had been agreed to by the Legislative Assembly), the premier was erecting a façade:

If we recall, it is in a motion passed by this assembly last year that the House of Ariki have the right to refer legislation back to the House of Assembly up to three times. This was the result of my attempt to protect the *ui ariki*, to make their establishment more similar to the House of Lords. But nowhere in this Bill have I found provision made whereby the House of Ariki can refer legisla-

tion back to this Assembly up to three times. . . . the more I learn about this House of Ariki the more convinced I become that there is no relation between the good talk that has been made and the real intention that is behind the establishing of this House of Ariki. (CILA 1966, 424-425)

Tangaroa Tangaroa, the member for Penrhyn, an island without an *ariki* at the time (CILA 1966, 458-461), had earlier put this opposing viewpoint more succinctly. "We should also ask," he said, "would not this break the backbone of the *ariki*?" (CILA 1966, 420). Over the next few years, as the House of Ariki sought unsuccessfully to influence policymaking and the legislative process, the suspicions voiced by Geoffrey Henry and Tangaroa Tangaroa would prove well founded. Called on to participate in nation building, *ariki* were to be denied any effective role in state making.

Initially, however, despite concerns about the House of Ariki Act, *ariki* demonstrated considerable enthusiasm for their new role and goodwill toward the government. In 1967, after sixteen lengthy meetings, a paper was presented to the government suggesting changes to land legislation (land leasing and land use) and the establishment of a tribunal to ensure that land legislation would more closely reflect Maori custom (CIR, Oct 1967, 11; CIN, 26 July 1967; 11 Aug 1967; 25 Aug 1967). The government prevaricated; certainly the ideals expressed were noble, but practicalities dictated caution. At the suggestion of the premier, a select committee was established to study the recommendations. This effectively buried the proposals because even though the select committee began hearing submissions soon after it was formed (CIN, 4 Oct 1967), it made no final report to the government (CIN, 19 Mar 1969; 12 Sept 1969).

In order to extend local identity into national identity (and reduce state labor costs), the government encouraged the formation of village committees. Cook Islanders (initially, Rarotongans) were encouraged to view participation in projects organized by their village committee (building roads and bridges, clearing irrigation drains, and so on) as participation in the building of the new nation. In Rarotonga, each village committee was represented on the Island Council, which decided project priorities and the allocation of government subsidies. A significant step in the practical disempowerment (and institutional exclusion) of *ariki* was the decision not to appoint any *ariki* to this council. Prior to 1965, *ariki* and their appointed nominees had served on such councils, but with the establishment of the House of Ariki it could now be argued that they had been ele-

vated to a position beyond the mundane concerns of these bodies. As the premier expressed it, "While some people may have felt sorry that the *ariki*s were no longer on the Island Council it must be realized that the *ariki*s go on to the House of Ariki, a council itself, but on a higher plane" (Rarotonga Island Council Minutes, 14 April 1966).

BREAKING THE BACK OF THE *ARIKI*

Ariki did not passively accept their "elevation" to the status of toothless national figureheads. In 1970 they elected Makea Nui Ariki, a long-standing opponent of Albert Henry, as the new president of the House of Ariki (CIN, 7 Aug 1970; 26 Aug 1970). She and her sister, the former holder of the Makea Nui title, had consistently opposed and frustrated the activities of the Cook Islands Progressive Association from the time of its formation by Albert Henry and others in 1943 (Scott 1991, 231, 241), and Makea later transferred her antipathy to its successor organization, the Cook Islands Party. She staged a dramatic challenge to Albert Henry at the inaugural meeting of the party in June 1964, and as a result was elected its first (if reluctant) president. Within two weeks, however, she had resigned. Scott suggested that, "On mature consideration, the aim of self-rule, not explicitly stated in the party charter, would have been unacceptable and, it must be added, the thought of sharing authority in a democratic organization must have been singularly unattractive" (Scott 1990, 294). That she would have had to share this authority with Albert Henry must have been equally unappealing.

After the first session of the House of Ariki under Makea's presidency, an aggressive paper containing proposals for empowering *ariki* in matters of land title and local government was presented to the Legislative Assembly. The proposals were debated between December 1970 and February 1971. The government was clearly alarmed by the overall implications of the proposals, one member suggesting that the House of Ariki was attempting to "get power in their hands and banish the people. Under the United Nations Declaration that is criminal and since we are part of the United Nations today we should not allow such things to happen in the Cook Islands" (CILA 10 Feb 1971, 791). When this speech was reported in the newspaper the following day, "House of Ariki" had become "*ariki*" and "get power" had become "get power back," thus deepening the disturbing undertones. Concerning a proposal that unoccupied village land

revert to titled leaders for redistribution, one government member warned that "the people would be servants of *ariki* as they were in the pre-Christian era" (CIN, 11 Feb 1971).

Ariki had also proposed that two traditional customs termed '*are korero*' and '*ara tiroa*', be revived. The '*are korero*' 'house of oratory and debate, comprising *ariki*, *mata'iapo* and *rangatira*' was to be called together by the *ariki* to consider matters affecting their district or island. If adopted, the proposal would have established a traditional body of titled, unelected leaders in opposition to the elected Island Councils from which, as already noted, *ariki* had been excluded. Not surprisingly, therefore, Albert Henry was unimpressed: "In the new nation called the Cook Islands this Assembly represents the '*are korero*' of the new nation. . . . I don't think that the authority that was held in ancient times should be given back to that '*are korero*' when their authority is invisible, it is in the House of Ariki and [for *mata'iapo* and *rangatira*] in the Island Council" (CILA, 2 Feb 1971, 781). He suggested instead that the '*are korero*' be revived as a place where young people might learn the oratory skills of their ancestors. Another government speaker proposed that "tribes" be encouraged to establish '*are korero*' as tourist attractions (CILA, 3 Feb 1971, 781). This was not exactly what the *ariki* had had in mind.

'*Ara tiroa*', as the term was used in the House of Ariki paper, referred to the customary duty to work for one's *ariki* whenever labor was requested. The paper recommended that such a tradition be revived for the building of the '*are korero*', and that "disobedience of the instructions of the *ariki* to assist in building the '*are korero*' may result in banishment and the seizure of the offender's home and property" (CILA, 2 Feb 1971, 777). Most members of the Legislative Assembly considered this suggestion to verge disturbingly on the despotic. It was, the premier pointed out, an anachronistic and authoritarian alternative to the village committee system. Within this system, he noted, "the people of the village are calling the *ariki* to come and help *them* do important work in the village" (CILA, 2 Feb 1971, 774; emphasis added). Not surprisingly, none of the recommendations discussed here gained any support when forwarded to the Legislative Assembly, and most of the remaining proposals concerning title and land succession fared equally badly. Only one recommendation was acceptable to the government, no doubt because it was in accordance with published Cook Islands Party policy. In 1968 the party had promised to "extend recognition to lesser traditional titles such as *mata'iapo* and *rangatira*" (CIP

1968). The House of Ariki had sought recognition of these titles as members of an *'are korero* under *ariki* control. For Albert Henry, however, such recognition would serve to bring *mata'apo* and *rangatira* more closely under the political umbrella of the Cook Islands Party.

The defeat of the House of Ariki paper dashed any lingering hopes that *ariki* might influence the government through formal structures, and between 1974 and 1977 such influence became impossible with the refusal of the premier to formally convene the House of Ariki. A threat by *ariki* of legal action, publicly announced in the *Cook Islands News* and *Pacific Islands Monthly*, was required before Albert Henry would carry out his duties under the House of Ariki Act (*PIM*, Feb 1977; *CIN*, 6 Dec 1976). Makea Nui was one of a number of influential Cook Islanders who, in 1971, had urged Tom Davis to return from the United States and challenge Albert Henry at the ballot box (Davis 1979, 62; 1992a, 214). By 1977 she was openly supporting her cousin and the Democratic Party, and it was widely assumed that many, if not most, of the *ariki* were also Democrat supporters (Davis 1992a, 214; 1992b). By this time conflict between the houses had become an aspect of a wider, deeply divisive, party politics. As the 1978 election approached, *ariki* found themselves allied with more highly educated Cook Islanders and local business people in their support for the Democratic Party (Crocombe 1979, 148; Crocombe and Crocombe 1979, 248). The Cook Islands Party claimed to represent the "little people" and attracted greater support from *mata'apo*, *rangatira*, and less well educated Cook Islanders.

Koutu Nui

In July 1972, after firmly rejecting the 1970 House of Ariki paper, the government amended the House of Ariki Act to establish an alternative, Cook Islands Party-friendly forum to the House of Ariki. Named the Koutu Nui, it comprised *mata'apo* and *rangatira*, many of whom were already active supporters of the party. Although *ariki* had been accorded limited recognition by successive colonial administrations since 1903, the authority of *mata'apo* and *rangatira* had remained unacknowledged (Ingram 1992, 154). In establishing the Koutu Nui, Albert Henry sought to drive a wedge of party politics into this colonially produced fissure in the traditional hierarchy. Under the new Act, the Koutu Nui was empowered to discuss and make recommendations "on any matters relating to the customs and traditions of the Cook Islands." These recommendations could

be forwarded to the Legislative Assembly through the House of Ariki, or they could be presented directly, bypassing the House of Ariki altogether (House of Ariki Amendment Act, 1972, section 23).

The Koutu Nui was sworn in during an elaborate ceremony on Koutu Nui Day, 21 June 1973. In a hall decorated with bunches of bananas, oranges, a coconut tree, and other local plants, more than fifty *mata'iapo* and *rangatira* repeated an oath by which they promised to serve their nation. They were ordained (*akatainu*) by a minister of the main religious denomination, the Cook Islands Christian Church. At the front of the hall was a pile of rocks (suggesting those that mark ancient *marae*) each of which was said to represent one of the ordained, titled leaders. The main speaker at the ceremony was, of course, the premier. He stressed that this body of traditional leaders was upholding an ancient heritage; they represented a time when you were "either born as a leader or warrior or not at all." They were also subtly reminded of the limits of their authority in the contemporary society: "Each and every one of you were born into the title and you were not elected as I and my Government have been elected to lead our people" (CIN, 21 June 1973). The day ended with a feast and dancing at Constitution Park.

In contrast to the House of Ariki, the Koutu Nui was very much the "traditional" wing of the Cook Islands Party. During their last five years of government, Albert Henry and the party shifted the dominant sense of nationhood away from that of a progressive and united people, represented by the party and a local royalty, to a "cultural" unity represented by the party and traditional leaders. As the economy became more dependent on tourism, national development required cultural development. A Cultural Division was established in 1974 to record traditional history, and more time was set aside for "culture" in primary and secondary schools. I have earlier referred to this period as a "first wave of ethnicization" (Sissons nd). Whereas during the earlier period of "party nationalism" *ariki* represented the "royal backbone" of a newborn nation, now *mata'iapo* and *rangatira* upheld the cultural heritage of an ancient nation whose origins could be traced to the pre-Christian era (CIN, 26 Feb 1973). Speaking at a ceremony for the investiture of a *ta'unga* 'priestly' title, the premier urged the retention of "the old hereditary titles": "Title-holders could be an influence for good in this community. The Government encouraged people to retain this identity, their language, their Maoritanga [Maori culture]" (CIN, 4 June 1975).

Mata'iapo and *rangatira* titles that had remained unclaimed for decades began to be conferred and the associated ceremonies became more elaborate. In 1971, during the debate over the House of Ariki recommendations, Albert Henry noted that according to custom, "the *ariki* must bite the head of the pig . . . the *mata'iapo* only bites the ear and if he did not do this he was not a recognised *mata'iapo* by Maori custom. Today there was no such custom and no way to recognise *mata'iapo*" (CIN, 22 Jan 1971). Subsequently (and certainly from 1975 onward), the biting of a pig's ear became a focal point of investiture ceremonies for *mata'iapo* and *ariki*. Photographs of newly ordained *mata'iapo*, draped in cloaks of large green *rauti* 'leaves of the *ti* tree' and biting the ears of pigs were featured in the government newspaper as visible evidence of cultural continuity (CIN, 29 Aug 1977). Even the premier adopted a traditional persona, accepting the title of Tu-mata-ora Mata'iapo, said to have been held by his late mother (CIN, 24 Jan 1977). He later became a member of the Koutu Nui, thus embodying the new alliance between traditional and elected leaders (CIN, 27 Jan 1977).

LETTING SLEEPING DOGS LIE

The Democratic Party, led by Tom Davis, became the government in July 1978 after a High Court decision overturning the results of the election of 30 March (Short 1979, 236–239). The Cook Islands Party, led by Albert Henry's cousin, Geoffrey Henry, regained power in March 1983, but a slim majority and the defection of Albert Henry's son meant that new elections were required seven months later. These returned Davis and the Democrats to the government benches. Davis held on as prime minister (and as leader of two coalition governments from 1984 onward) until July 1987, when he lost a cabinet vote of no confidence (PIM, April 1983; Sept 1984; Aug 1985; Sept 1987). Despite political instability, these Davis years were a period of strong, tourism-led economic growth. By 1988, almost three-quarters of all paid employment was in the tourism-dependent service sector, and much of the secondary-sector employment (eg, hotel construction) was also tourism related. Coinciding with this economic transformation was an expansion of a more highly educated, more highly paid, white-collar salariat, employed mainly in the government and business sectors. By 1989 they comprised 52 percent of the workforce (ADB 1992, Comment A; Sissons nd). For this new middle class and for the expanding

business sector, support for the Democrats had undoubtedly had its rewards.

Davis and the Democrats had also come to power with the support of the majority of *ariki*. But if, in return for this backing, *ariki* had expected to play a greater formal role in the political process they were to be greatly disappointed. Davis had intended to expand the role of the House of Ariki into one similar to the House of Lords, but all his attempts were frustrated at cabinet level:

My plan was simply to extend their powers for dealing, not only with the cultural stuff, lands and culture, but to extend them so that every bill would go for their perusal . . . that would have given the House of Ariki something useful to do, and it's exactly what England did with the House of Lords. . . . [But] it was never debated [in the Legislative Assembly], I never took it that far. The lawyers in my group [party] and those who were not title-holders were absolutely against it, and yet the *ariki* were the ones who put us into power. It disappointed me greatly. I tried many times. It was in Cabinet that these discussions took place, I never put it into the House, there was no support for it . . . they saw it as a threat, that the *ariki* would get power again and they would lose their elected powers. The fear is still there. (Davis 1992b)

Instead, as the ethnicized "party" nationalism of Albert Henry lost its ideological force, the symbolic status of *ariki* as local "royalty" was reconfirmed. The new democratic nation symbolically reaffirmed its identity as a member of the Commonwealth by placing a Union Jack in the corner of a new flag, the background color of which was changed from Cook Islands Party green to blue. The integrity of the new nation was to depend more on "sound administration" and a well-planned economy than on charismatic leadership and the rhetoric of tradition.

If the House of Ariki had difficulty in increasing its influence on the legislative process its counterpart, the Koutu Nui, found it virtually impossible. Davis had little interest in perpetuating what he viewed as a tool of the former Cook Islands Party government:

[Traditionally] the Koutu Nui didn't exist. The *ariki* always traditionally passed on things to the *mata'apo*, and therefore the House of Ariki was a good place to develop that, so *ariki*s would go back and confer with their *mata'apo*. Now [with the formation of the Koutu Nui] they've made *mata'apo* equal with *ariki* and destroyed the traditional system. The *mata'apo* see it as great power and they love it. It contradicts the principle of democracy and it contra-

dicts the original Polynesian structure. Therefore you're not recovering culture, you're introducing a new culture altogether, transforming it into something new that has never existed, and for political reasons. (Davis 1992b)

Despite his antipathy toward the Koutu Nui, Davis did not repeal the amendment to the House of Ariki Act, preferring instead to confine the Koutu Nui to the margins of political life: "They never had any clear ideas from the beginning of the formation of the Koutu Nui. Albert Henry never knew what to do with it having formed it. I just let it lie and didn't wake any sleeping dogs. I felt my role was to let sleeping dogs lie and let them get up and scratch themselves every now and then" (Davis 1992b).

The virtual exclusion of *mata'iapo* and *rangatira* from the formal political process did not mean a devaluation of their status at the local level, but the reverse. During the Davis years there was a spectacular increase in the frequency and elaborateness of *akamarokura* 'investiture ceremonies' for these titles. In the five-year period following the formation of the Koutu Nui (1973–1977), the *Cook Islands News* reported 5 *akamarokura* for *mata'iapo* and *rangatira*. By comparison, during the next five years of Democratic Party government (1978–1982), investitures for 22 new *mata'iapo* and *rangatira* were reported, a fourfold increase. The high degree of public interest in such events suggests that most, if not all, investitures would have been reported over the ten-year period, and that the reported increase was therefore a real one. It represented a continuation and intensification, at a local level, of a revival of tradition that had been initiated at a national level by Albert Henry's government. Encouraged by tourist development, which reinforced the value of tradition, the revival process had gathered enough momentum to continue without direct government support. As tradition was accorded greater value in the tourist marketplace, so was traditional status in the wider community, irrespective of the level of formal, state recognition. Although in one sense the Koutu Nui may have been sleeping and scratching, in another they were actively expanding their numbers and growing in self-esteem.

RIDING A SECOND WAVE OF ETHNICIZATION

The reelection, in 1989, of a Cook Islands Party government led by Geoffrey Henry initiated a second wave of ethnicization; the Cook Islands began to be more openly promoted as a Maori nation (see Sissons nd).

This heightened sense of ethnic nationalism was encouraged by the government, through the establishment of a Ministry of Cultural Development, by the rapidly expanding tourist industry, and, in 1991 and 1992, by preparations for hosting the Sixth Festival of Pacific Arts. During the build-up for the festival, traditional leaders were called on by the government to actively encourage local pride in culture and community. *Mata'ia'apo* and *rangatira* organized village beautification projects and participated in meetings with government officials to organize accommodation, catering, transport, and other services for the festival participants. As state employees, a number of influential *mata'ia'apo* and *rangatira* were also engaged in planning festival ceremonies, among the most significant being the opening ceremony and welcome rituals for a fleet of ocean-going canoes that would sail to Rarotonga from other Pacific islands.

In order to ensure that the Cook Islands was well represented at the *vaka* 'canoe' pageant, the Ministry of Cultural Development encouraged the construction of *vaka* by local communities. The southern-group islands of Mangaia, Atiu, Ma'uke, Mitiaro, and Aitutaki each built a double-hulled sailing canoe, and two *vaka* were built on Rarotonga—one by Sir Tom Davis on behalf of the Takitumu district and the other by the Uritaua, a *ngati* of the Te Au-o-Tonga district. These projects, in which titleholders usually assumed leading roles, were also occasions for the revival and reworking of tradition; tree-felling rituals were performed; restrictions on the participation of women in the canoe-construction process were enforced; dancing, singing, and feasting marked significant stages in the construction process. For Uritaua leaders, the *vaka* project was deliberately undertaken to strengthen *ngati* unity. To this end, a *marae* was established beside the canoe house:

We had to build our own meeting place before we started with the *vaka*. The *vaka* is the people—the piece of “stick” that we are turning into a *vaka* is just a symbol, to symbolize the family. We got the stones [for the *marae*] from all the lands of Uritaua. We didn't go anywhere else, we went on the land of Uritaua and collected the stones. And every man, woman and child joined forces to put the stones there. [We had] a big *umukai* [feast] to dedicate the *marae*. We put people to represent each *kopu* [family] on each of the stones, to be recognised and known by the young and old of the day. They were all dressed in local *rauti* [ti leaves] and each *kopu* prepared food for the function, for the guests invited. (Taruia 1992)

Umukai were also held to mark the cutting and hauling of the logs and the completion of the vessel. Such projects also had flow-on effects, encouraging other groups to articulate a traditional distinctiveness. In this instance, because the establishment of the Uritaua *marae* was initiated by members of the inland section of the *ngati* (Uritaua-ki-uta), a second *marae* was built a year later by the coastal section (Uritaua-ki-tai).

Titled leaders were also active in the revival and perpetuation of traditions independently of particular government or tourist industry agendas. In the Takitumu district, in 1989, a *marae* of Pa Ariki (Pokata Akinanga) was reconstructed, and steps leading to the ruins of Pa's nineteenth-century "palace" were rebuilt. Subsequently, at an innovative "traditional" ceremony performed at the reconstructed *marae*, Pa Ariki invested or reinvested fifteen *rangatira* titles:

The ceremony started about 9.30 am with drums heralding the advancement of the investiture party. Pa Tapaeru dressed in traditional finery—*tapa* cloth and feathered head-dress with her royal fan—led the procession with her *uaatuatua* (spokesman) Maote Mata'iaipo (Kiriau Turepu), who wore green *rauti* leaves. Behind them walked the *rangatira* in *rauti* costumes and then a truck carrying the drummers brought up the rear. They came from the historical site of Pa Tapaeru's palace about 100 metres down the road from Pokata Akinanga. As they came on to Pokata Akinanga, a series of traditional welcomes (*turou*) were extended to the group by warriors backed by Timoti Turu in a splendid *tapa* costume. They advanced on to the *pokata* with the *ariki* and her spokesman standing in the middle flanked on two sides by the *rangatira*. (CIN, 26 Aug 1989)

After a prayer from a visiting Tahitian pastor, the spokesman introduced the *rangatira* and explained the significance of their titles to the gathering: "Stone seats were already located at the site for each *rangatira*. Pa Tapaeru, with much emotion, invested her *rangatira* by placing her left hand behind their heads" (CIN, 26 Aug 1989).

At the local level, the election of a Cook Islands Party government, tourism, and the Festival of Pacific Arts provided a fertile context for the elaboration and strengthening of title hierarchy and tradition-based identity, particularly for Rarotonga; the festival *vaka* projects in the outer islands were also occasions for the reproduction of local hierarchy. The heightened level of ideological participation in nationhood was not

matched, however, by greater political participation in local or national government.

The House of Ariki continued to press for the right to determine title succession and to prescribe customs relating to title succession and land tenure (Draft Amendment Bill, Nov 1991). Yet despite early hints that the government might at last give *ariki* a greater role in the legislative process (CIN, 1 Mar 1989), the proposed amendments to the House of Ariki Act have remained unacceptable. Sir Tom Davis suggested that under a Cook Islands Party government this will always be so: Sir Geoffrey Henry “doesn’t foresee the House of Ariki as having any powers whatsoever, and he knows that a lot of them are supportive of the opposition. I don’t think he intends to give the powers of the elected legislature to anybody else. So it’s all a lot of hot air” (1992b).

Following my discussions with Sir Tom Davis concerning the place of titled leaders in Cook Islands society, he reiterated his views in his occasional column for the *Cook Islands News*. There he pointed to a central dilemma faced by his former coalition partner: “Without positive involvement in the governing process the House of Ariki will continue to be symbolic. If preservation of our culture is as important as the present government says it is this symbolism is not enough, but whatever the involvement might be, it should not be to their detriment or ridicule” (CIN, 4 Mar 1992). In other words, the challenge would be to find a way to allow *ariki* to become positively involved in politics and yet retain their status as national figureheads. The former would inevitably work against the latter.

Because of their closer links with the Cook Islands Party, members of the Koutu Nui were optimistic that they would be given a more active role in government than the House of Ariki. The Koutu Nui reconvened in 1988, after a ten-year period of inactivity, and after the 1989 election its leaders entered into discussions with government representatives with a view to drafting a new Local Government bill (CIN, 7 Mar 1989). Initially, for Rarotonga, a single-island council, consisting of titled representatives from eight district councils was proposed (CIN, 20 Mar 1989). However, ancient *vaka* differences reasserted themselves and the Takitumu district subsequently proposed that its council of titled leaders (*pu-ara*) should act as a local government for the *vaka*, and that other *vaka* should follow suit. When I talked with senior members of the Koutu Nui in 1992 and

1993, they were struggling to find a compromise solution, and a number of alternatives were being discussed, both formally and informally.

Differences in ideal structures were informed by long-standing differences over the proper relationships between *ariki* and *mata'apo*, and hence between the House of Ariki and the Koutu Nui. One view stressed the ideal paramountcy of *ariki* over *mata'apo*, and its advocates sought local government structures which reinstated this relationship. Others thought that *ariki* should be content with a purely symbolic status and were disturbed by attempts by *ariki* to gain control over title and land succession. They stressed that *mata'apo* should have independent authority within their own *tapere* 'subdistrict', and that they were not directly answerable to *ariki*. Local government structures should reflect this, they argued. A proponent of this latter view sketched the ideal structure for me (Figure 1). If this model were adopted, the House of Ariki would remain a largely symbolic entity. The Koutu Nui would involve itself with general policy issues relating to village hygiene, animal control, voluntary work projects, and youth activities. District and outer island councils would have a high degree of autonomy in the way government money is spent at the local level. Predictably, the nondemocratic nature of this and other structures that devolved local government to unelected titleholders was of concern to many, particularly Democratic Party supporters. Although the

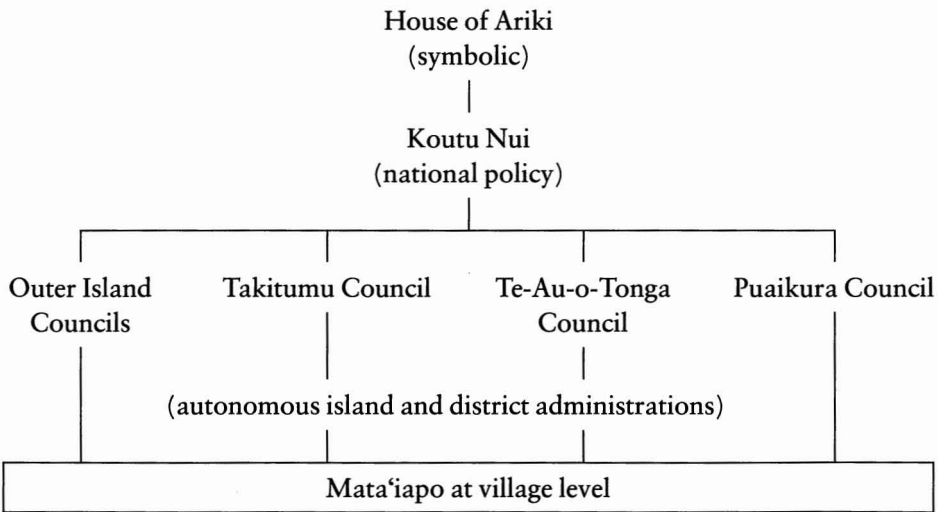


FIGURE 1. Suggested tradition-based local government structure.

prime minister indicated support for some devolution of power to traditional leaders, it would always be difficult to sell any such proposal to the wider electorate.

CONCLUSION

Because nation-building in the Cook Islands has been pursued through the contradictory processes of ideological inclusion and political exclusion, shifting national definitions have remained ambiguous and contested. For a Cook Islands projected as Britain on a much smaller scale—an infant in relation to a mother country—the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of *ariki* expressed both its antiquity and its modernity. *Ariki*, ideologically included as the “backbone” of the country, connected the child to its ancestral past and identified it with other successful models of nationhood. The political exclusion of *ariki* from effective participation in state power only confirmed the nation’s modern democratic status.

For a contemporary Cook Islands, projected as a Polynesian nation, a proud Maori nation among other Pacific peoples, the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of *mata’iapo* and *rangatira* more openly asserted a postcoloniality and expressed a more marketable distinctiveness. *Mata’iapo* and *rangatira* are ideologically included in the nation as representatives of a resurgent indigeness, or as local embodiments of an increasingly commodified culture. Reluctance by the central government to devolve power to these titled leaders reflects not only the fears of elected representatives, but also the extent to which the values and ideals of modernity continue to inform a popular national image.

The transition between the initial Cook Islands Party nationalism of the 1960s and early 1970s and the contemporary national definition was accompanied by dramatic political and economic changes—the demise of Albert Henry’s dominantly one-party state, and the rapid expansion of a tourism-based economy. The first change was associated with a shift to a less personalized, less homogeneous, more decentered sense of nationhood, while the second saw the development of an increasingly commodified, postmodern national space in which “modern” and “traditional” identities now rub shoulders. Whereas in the Solomon Islands “talk about chiefs” may establish and maintain an autonomous “discursive space” distinct from “global modernizing forces” (White 1992, 101), in the Cook Islands contemporary talk of titles is as much an expression of, as it is a

reaction to, those forces. The commodification and marketing of national identity as cultural identity is an incitement to discourse about titles and entitlement, and this in turn takes on greater authority within a globalized national context.

In a review of anthropological and related writings on the making of national cultures, Foster (1991) asks whether these globalizing forces will make it increasingly difficult for national collectivities to see themselves as bounded, or whether increased exposure to cultural flows will "stimulate and underpin reactive attempts to circumscribe and assert a distinctively national culture" (1991, 237). For the Cook Islands the second option is clearly in evidence. However, the cultural boundaries that government and traditional leaders are drawing around themselves and their people are highly permeable to flows of people, money, goods, and ideas. If the future maintenance of these boundaries requires that their permeability be reduced, *mata'apo* and *rangatira* could yet participate in a more concerted localized defense of traditional community. The extent to which *ariki* might, or indeed could, be included in such a project must remain an open question.

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Abstract

The main body of this article is a narrative account of the partial inclusion of traditional titleholders in the Cook Islands nation as representatives of local "royalty" or an ancient Polynesian heritage. Shifting forms of ideological inclusion and political exclusion are discussed in relation to changes in the way the nation-building project has been pursued since self-government in 1965. Of particular interest is how successive Cook Islands leaders have sought to incorporate a partly disempowered traditional leadership into a postcolonial imagined community. Between 1965 and 1974, during a period of party nationalism, Albert Henry encouraged the view that *ariki*, as local "royalty" should remain above and outside everyday politics. With the development of a local tourist industry, local titleholders came to embody a valued ancient heritage. However, this greater symbolic empowerment did not translate into a greater role in local government. The

defeat of Albert Henry in 1978 by Tom Davis and the Democratic Party saw local-level titleholders ignored by the government in favor of the symbolic reinstatement of an indigenous royalty. Since 1989, in the context of a rapidly expanding tourist industry and a growing middle class, local traditional leaders have once more been seeking to translate increased symbolic status into real political autonomy. Contradictory developments until the present suggest that, despite encouraging government rhetoric, these efforts are destined to meet with limited success.